

Period of Danger, Hope For Catholics of Spain

By MANUEL MIRA

Madrid — (NC) — The Spanish Catholic Church, looking toward the future, is going through a transition. Recent events mark the beginning of a period of danger, but also of hope, in the complete renewal of Spanish Catholicism.

Although it is difficult to ascertain how long this transition will last, it is certain there will be no return to the past.

Some problems which the Spanish Church has been facing appear to be somewhat sensational and serious. For example, the friction between Catholic Action and some members of the hierarchy; the action of young priests in organizing "clandestine" movements to criticize the hierarchy on the ground that the bishops are diverging from the norms of the Second Vatican Council.

THE FACT of the matter is that because these events are taking place in Spain it can truly be said that the Church in this country is undergoing a process of evolution.

It would not be normal for the Church to continue as it was 10 years ago or as it was before the Vatican Council II.

Because the police in Barcelona attack some priests demonstrating to demand human rights, or because the Ministry of Information confiscates an edition of Signo, a weekly of the Catholic youth organization, one must not conclude that the Church in Spain is being persecuted. These and other events reflect a change, and the fact that they have happened shows that there is now more latitude for discussion within the Church and among the Spanish people.

As Archbishop Antonio Riber, the Apostolic Nuncio to Spain, said: "There is rather a feeling of anticlericalism instead of a direct attack on the Church; a secret desire, a hidden hunger, for rapport with the bishops, to have them be the ones who lead, bless the initial movements, push the wheels against inertia toward investigation . . ."

In order to appreciate the present status of the Spanish Church, it is necessary to keep in mind this nation's political and social circumstances. Three years after a terrible civil strife the "official" Catholic sector triumphed. The Church found itself on the winning side — governed, since then by a dictatorship — and with its back to those who had been defeated.

On the other hand, without any political discrimination, the Catholic lay organizations, seminaries and, of course, the churches, were always ready to welcome all of the faithful. Today, we find Spanish priests who are sons of former Loyalist parents, and lay Catholic leaders who oppose the political regime.

Naturally, in a country primarily Catholic, it cannot be said that the winning elements were only the Catholics nor that they were "only the good Catholics."

The Church suffered much persecution during the Civil War, but it never considered the defeated as guilty. Instead, it accomplished a decisive mission toward national reconciliation; it paved the road to coexistence and to the democracy which lurks in the horizon.

This mission of the Spanish Church gained tremendous momentum, thanks to Vatican Council II. Perhaps in no other country in the world did the ecumenical Council have such an impact.

The ecumenical Council's influence is strongly felt not only by the Spanish Church, but also by all of Spain. It has accomplished more than any outside pressures or anti-government campaigns in bringing about changes in the present regime.

Catholic Spain must develop with the Church. It is a fact that the system of dictatorship is disappearing in this country. The structures of a regime born from the civil strife pervade, but a democratic future is in the offing.

The post-Civil War generation is more interested in the future than in the past. Not too long ago the Catholic daily Ya published a cartoon showing a grandfather talking with his son. He is telling the child a story and the latter exclaims: "Grandfather, stop talking about the past and tell me about the future!"

The government still maintains a monopoly on foreign information and, in addition, controls more than 80 per cent of the sources of information in the nation, but censorship has been eliminated. A limited freedom of press is being tested, in contrast to the rigid censorship measures practiced for the past 30 years.

Students have done away with compulsory Falange student associations, which were the only ones allowed to exist, and are replacing them with free, democratic students' associations. The Falange is Spain's only legal political party. Also, the government's labor organizations are disappearing or are changing their structure.

Religious liberty is an accomplished fact; only a law that will recognize it is needed. In the preparation for such a law, a man of clear, liberal and democratic thinking has come forth. He is Antonio Garrigues, Spanish ambassador to the Holy See, who has intervened also in the study of another law to reconstruct the state's structure. The law is to be submitted to the Spanish people for a referendum.

The evolution of a regime composed solely of "the winners" is very difficult. There are too many forces interested in blocking, or at least in slowing down, the progress of democracy. And there is, above all, fear.

In the newspaper Ya, Jose Maria Sanchez de Munain, a prominent member of the Spanish Catholic Press Association, denounced this fear. Referring to right-wing Spanish Catholics,

he says: "They feel an inconquerable fear." This, he said is fear that, if the people are allowed to govern themselves, they will once more produce nothing but chaos, bloodshed and sacrilegious acts.

Munain speaks of this fear of right-wing Catholics as "a painful imprint which history has left upon our collective spirit." He tells the Catholics of other countries: "It is difficult for you to understand certain aspects of our ideologies and behavior because you ignore the psychological trauma from which these spring."

He stresses the need for "therapy" to combat "that sick and anachronous obsession, that fear of the people," if the structural lines for an authentic Christian democracy are ever to be traced.

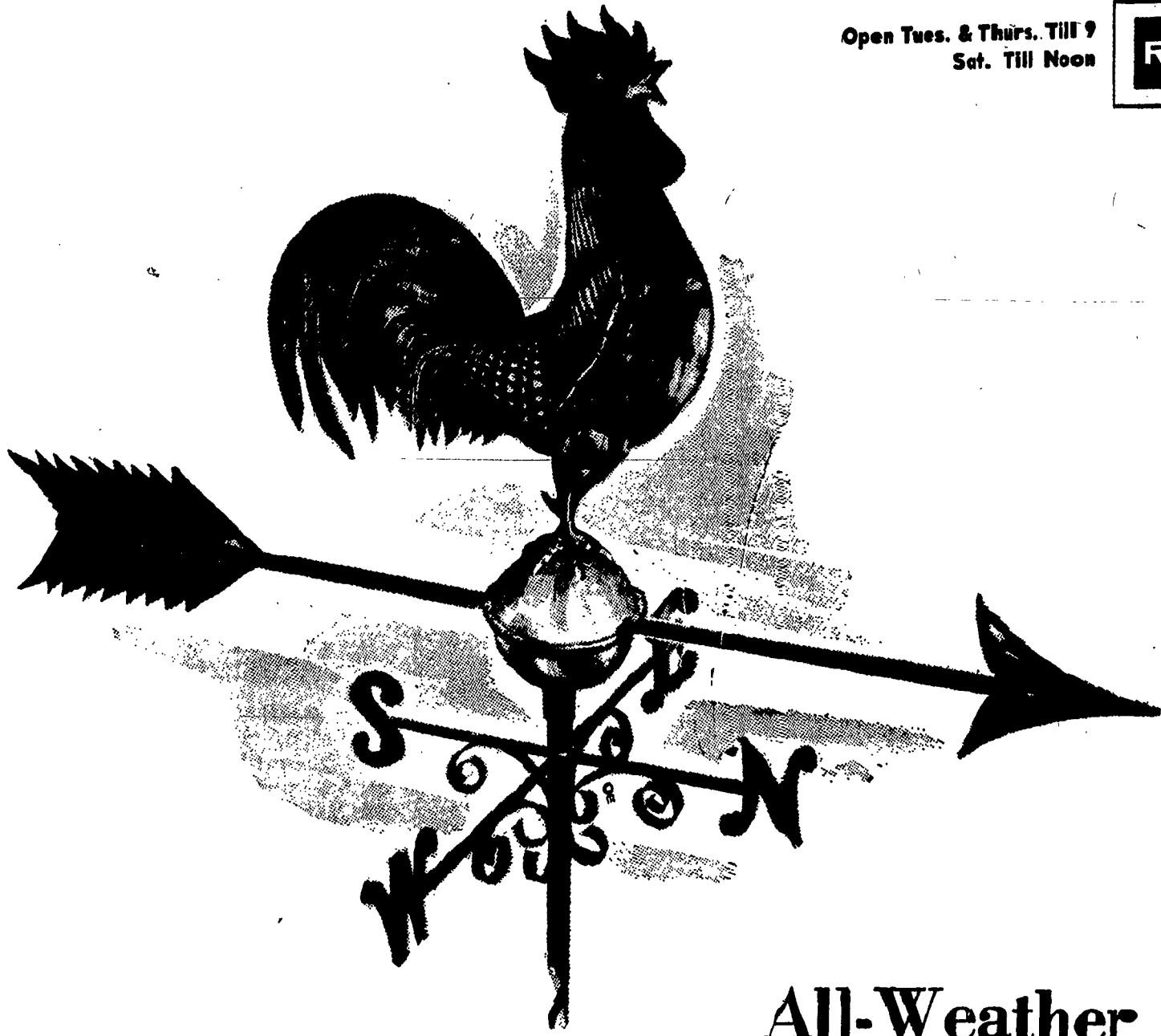
He is right when he denounces that fear as "sick and anachronous"; any observer can realize that the Spanish people wish to maintain the peace they have enjoyed for so many years, thanks to a dictatorship, but they also wish to put an end to the dictatorship.

The Spaniards are, above all, interested in guaranteeing and increasing the relative prosperity which has cost them so much effort. On the other hand, the influence exerted by tourists and emigrants returning to their homeland is being felt in the newness of their ideas. The influx of tourists adds up to almost half the Spanish population, one tourist for every two Spanish citizens.

Spain is ceasing to be "different," and the Spanish Church is profoundly and speedily changing. As an article in the Jesuit magazine "Facts and Sayings" said, "the Spanish Church is learning the wheels of official stagnation and complacency toward realism and liberty. Sheltered Christianity is turning into a Christianity of confrontation and this is being done with the help of all Christians and with unbelievers, many of whom have arrived at their disbelief because of the anemia of our faith. Our religious convictions will gain in sincerity and in depth, our Catholicism in authenticity."

This publication indicated that Spain must strive for a Christian concept of government. "The Church urges us to join in this enterprise," it added. "Ever parting from the point of view of religious unity," the article went on to say, "the privileges granted the Church by the State is very questionable. We have run the danger of preferring this privilege to religious liberty. In the same manner, we must forget about imposing religion by force. Intolerance is incompatible with freedom of religion. Christianity cannot, nor does it intend to, progress by supporting itself on politics."

For emphasizing separation of State and Church, the magazine concluded: "The present Spanish situation is historically transitory. Vatican Council II urges the revision of the Spanish concordat with the Vatican so that the independence of the Church from State can be secured, not only in matters of principles but also in the field of action. Concerning the appointment of bishops, the Pope's wishes are clear: it is to be hoped that we may know how to follow them."



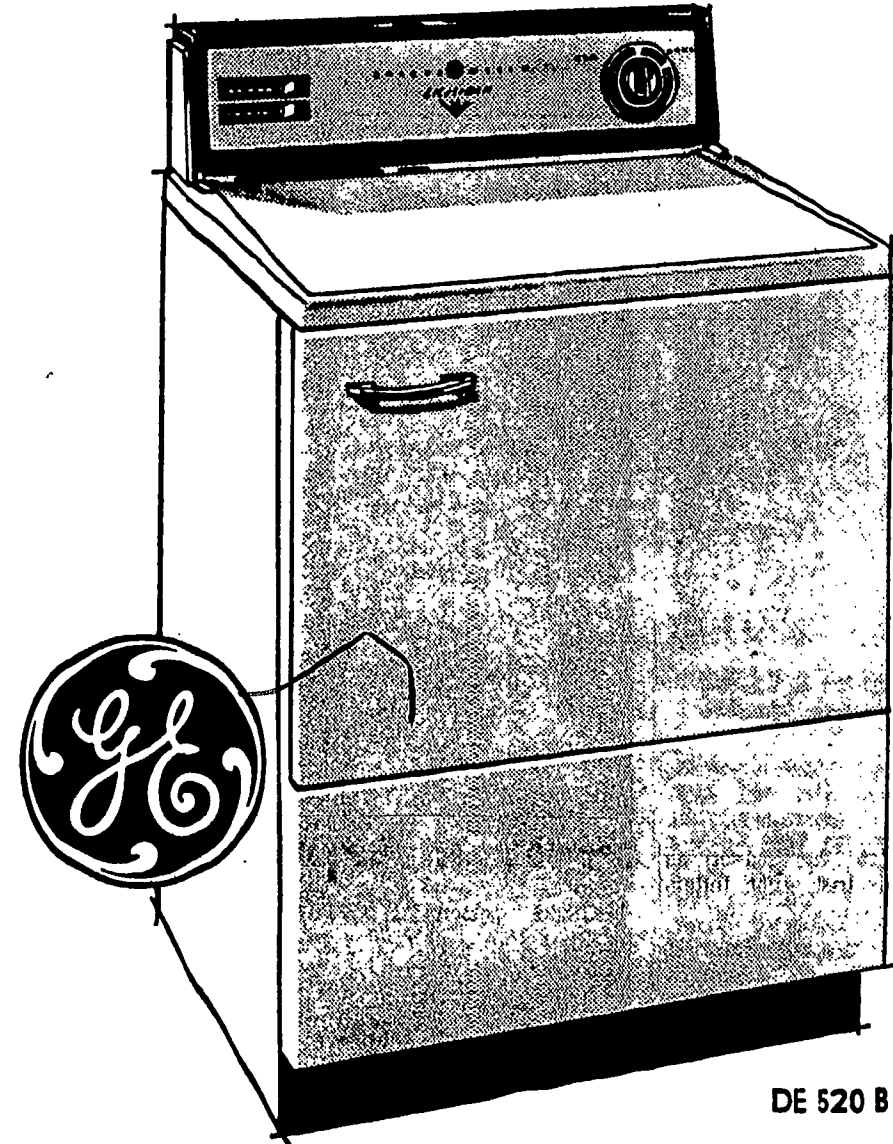
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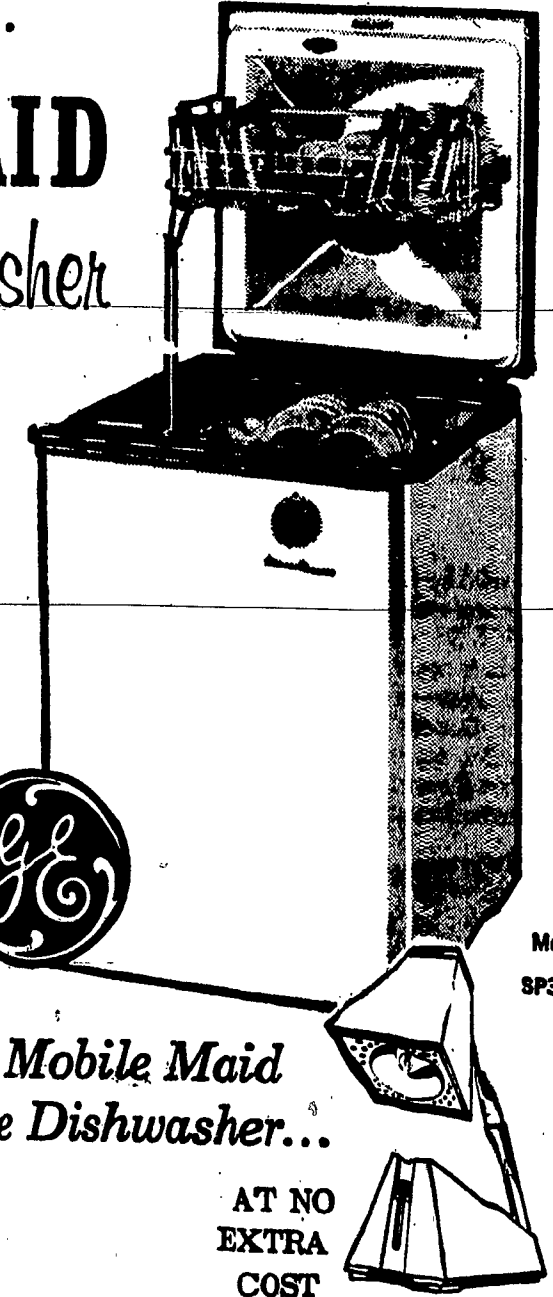
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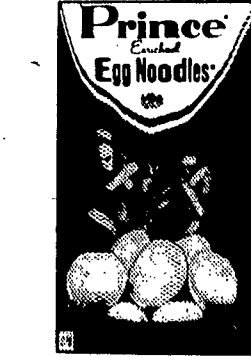
PRESIDENT KENNEDY takes a moment from his busy schedule to greet his son, John, in a scene from "John F. Kennedy: Years of Lightning, Day of Drums." Presented by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the film opened this week in the Rochester area.

Integration in Five Years

Chicago — (RNS) — A target date of 1972 for voluntary desegregation of regional organizations of The Methodist Church was set here at the denomination's General Conference.

An overwhelming majority of delegates set the date after more than three hours of debate. About 20 of the 800 delegates present voted against the action.

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